NUMB. VII

The LAY-MONK.

Nec quod fuimuſq; ſumuſq;
Cras erimus. Ovid.

MONDAY, *November* 30. 1713.

MY Third Paper gave the Reader a general Account of my Story, and of the chief Incidents and Revolutions of my Life, in Alluſion to which I am call'd the PYTHAGOREAN. I ſhall now give him a Draught of my Humour, and of the Frame of my Mind; by which he wil obſerve, that there is a ſurprizing Agreement between the Variety of my Fortunes and of my Inclinations, and that it is very much owing to my native Genius, as well as to Accidents in my Life, that I have been hurried thro' ſo great a Diverſity of *Tranſmigrations*.

I am deſcended from the *Ravenſcrofts*, an ancient Family in *Norfolk*. My Father was *Rowland Ravenſcroft*, a Gentleman neither rich nor indigent, well eſteem'd in the Country for his vertuous Life and charitable Diſpoſition. He was a Field-Officer in the King's Army in the Civil Wars, and behav'd like a Man of Conduct and Courage; and tho' he often reflected with ſome Reſentment on his unrewarded Service after the *Reſtoration*, while ſome of his worthleſs unmilitary Neighbours, who never had a Shed plunder'd, or a Hen-roaſt robb'd in the Cauſe, were promoted to Poſts of great Profit and Honour; yet he inflexibly adher'd to the Intereſt of the Crown, and continu'd a zealous Royaliſt to his dying Day. My Mother was a *Barker*, a Perſon of great Probity, Oeconomy, and domeſtick Diligence. The Affairs of her Family engroſs'd all her Time and Concern. But that which obſcur'd her excellent Qualities, and made her Life leſs comfortable to her ſelf, and leſs agreeable to others, was too ſtrong an Infuſion of Spleen in her Conſtitution.

Hence perhaps I derive my native Levity and Irreſolution, which was remarkable in my Behaviour from a Child; when, as I have been told, I was preſently weary of my Play-Things, and continually call'd for a new Toy, and a different Hobby-horſe. At Nine Years old, I liſten'd, unobſerv'd, and heard my Mother ſpeaking of me, ſay to a Friend, *'Tis a notable ſhrewd Boy! You can't imagine what Queſtions he'll ſtart, what apt and ready Anſwers he'll make, and what ſurprizing Thoughts will come into his Head; but withal he has a rambling Brain and a ſtrange Fickleneſs of Temper; he aims at every thing, but ſticks to nothing; we hope he'll be ſettled by Years and Experience, but at preſent he's an odd out-of-the-way whimſical Child.*

My Parents being dead, I was continu'd for ſome time at a Country-School, and at the Age of Fourteen ſent by my Uncle and Guardian, Mr. *Humphry Ravenſcroft*, to *Oxford*, where I ſoon acquir'd ſuch Logical Abilities, that I form'd Syllogiſms to a Miracle, and apply'd Diſtinctions with the greateſt Acuteneſs in the World. I diſcern'd the Difference between Demonſtration and a probable Argument, between Certainty and Opinion; grew very ſharp in impoſing or detecting a Fallacy, and was in a fair way to have maſter'd all the ſubtile Notions of Metaphyſicks: But falling into Company with ſome ingenious Students of a pleaſanter Turn, I was ſo charm'd with their Converſation, that I quickly deſpis'd the heavy Logician, and the Men of *Queen's*, and reſolv'd to ſet up for a Wit. In order to this, I turn'd *Ariſtotle* and his dull Commentators adrift, and fill'd my Study with Novels, Plays, and the polite Writings of the fineſt Spirits of the Age. But this Humour did not laſt long, I ſoon grew weary of ſpending my Life like a Comedian, in Raillery and Ridicule: I broke off from my merry Friends, having diſcover'd that the greateſt Part of them were by no Means Nature's Wits, but that their Ingenuity was either the Creature of the Bottle, forc'd like crude and early Fruits by foreign Heat, or the Production of Labour and wretched Affectation.

In

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In this Juncture, when I had taſted to Satiety, theſe ingenious Entertainments, which were too luſcious for my weak Stomach, a Friend of mine carry'd me to *Aſhmole's Muſeum*, where I was delighted with an infinite Variety of Natural and Mechanical Curioſities, amaſs'd with great Induſtry and Expence. I was charm'd with the ineſtimable Treaſure of Coins, Medals, Ores, oddly figur'd Stones, and uncommon Minerals; and mightily pleas'd with the wonderful Collection of rare Shells, Beetles, Graſhoppers, Butterflies, and many other curious and beautiful little Animals. I preſently reſolv'd to furniſh a Cloſet with the like Rarities, and to accompliſh my Deſign, form'd a Scheme of Correſpondence, as well with foreign Countries, as the Provinces of *Britain*: I had not long been a Virtuoſo in Foſſiles and Inſects, when, either out of Levity, or from an Apprehenſion that the Labour was too great for my Temper, and the Expence for my Pocket, my Fancy grew cool and untaſtful of this Amuſement; and beſides, I perceiv'd at laſt, that if I continu'd this Purſuit, I ſhould be perpetually employ'd in gathering, and ſhewing with Solemnity a Heap of Trifles, and paſs all my Days in a great Toy-Shop.

My Appetite being pall'd to theſe Entertainments, by which many diligent Men, ſtudious of natural Hiſtory, have propagated their Fame; an Antiquary, by Chance, led me to the Court of the *Theatre*, and walking round it, read learnedly upon a Piece of an old Wall, preſerv'd with great Care, then upon a Fragment of *Porphyry*, which he aſſur'd me was Part of a God of the firſt Rank among the ancient *Indians*; in one Place, he ſhew'd me ſeveral odd Characters, which he call'd Emblems and *Egyptian* Hieroglyphicks, and explain'd them till they were perfectly paſt my Underſtanding; in another, he pointed to an ill figur'd Marble, in which there had been many engraven Marks and Sentences, but the Teeth of Time had gnaw'd out the Words, only ſome half Letters remain'd, by Means of which, the learned Sage made out the Myſtery, and decipher'd the whole Inſcription: This was the only Species of Learning, of which I had no Manner of Reliſh.

At another Time, I attended with great Pleaſure to a *German* Adept, who related, in the common Room of our College, the Powers and Wonders of Chymiſtry; this preſently ſtarted a new Paſſion, and ſet me agog after the untaſted Satisfaction of ſeeing theſe amazing Operations of the Fire: Determin'd to gratify this Inclination, I ſpent more Time and Money in this bewitching Amuſement, than I am willing to own. I was once, as I verily believed, within an Ace of the *Grand Elixir*, and after a diligent Proceſs of four Years, an Inſtance of Conſtancy I never ſhew'd before, if we may give any Credit to Adepts, or depend on the unerring Rules of this profound Art, I brought the Philoſopher's Stone into half a Pint of Liquor; and then, as my Manner is, I grew weary even of Succeſs, and neglected my good Fortune: This precious Liquor however I ſtill preſerve, and when I find a Genius worthy of ſo invaluable a Secret, I intend to beſtow it upon him as a Preſent. If none ſuch appear in my Life-time, I ſhall leave it by my Will in the Hands of Truſtees, to be given to any Publick ſpirited Perſon, who ſhall have found out the Longitude, or ſhall have reconciled the different Parties and Intereſts that divide this Nation.

Thus my Inclination carry'd me to all Kinds of Learning, but chiefly to thoſe out of the common Way: I gain'd a ſuperficial Smattering in each, but following every Thing by Fits and Starts, I was never ſedate and fix'd enough to be become a Maſter in any.

My Fancy being ſo deſultory, my Taſte ſo changeable, and my Diſpoſition of Mind ſo ill adapted to Labour, I amus'd my ſelf only in forming Sketches and imperfect Draughts of Science; and if ever I expreſs'd Beauty and Symetry, it was by delineating particular Parts unconnected with the Whole: Suppoſe a Painter ſhould fill his Room with *Tableaus*, in ſome of which he had drawn nothing but Eyes and Ears, in ſome only Mouths and Noſes, and in others none but Legs and Arms, and had never united theſe Parts to make one finiſh'd Figure, this would be ſome Reſemblance of my Imagination, which is fill'd with numerous diſunited Branches, but is not adorn'd with one compleat Syſtem.

When I arriv'd at my Forty-ſecond Year, I began to ſettle into a more conſiſtent Diſpoſition of Mind and Regularity of Judgment; then my Life became more equal and uniform, which was not a little owing to the wiſe Counſel and frequent Converſation of Sir EUSTACE LOCKER, to whom at that Time I had the Honour to be known: It was he that introduc'd and recommended me to the Favour and Friendſhip of his ingenious and learned Acquaintance, and firſt propos'd me as Secretary to our Society, of which my former Papers have given a particular Account.

Whereas a Letter is come to the Author of this Paper from a Perſon in Misfortune, for Advice. Mr. RAVENSCROFT not knowing all the Particulars of his Caſe, is of Opinion, That he ſhou'd immediately apply himſelf to ſome prudent Friend, and by all Means avoid the Courſe he ſeems at preſent inclin'd to take.

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